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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 001011

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [OPDC](#) [WI](#) [MO](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: POLISARIO "AMBASSADOR" DELIVERS ABDELAZIZ LETTER TO SECRETARY RICE, EXPLAINS POLISARIO POSITION ON MOROCCAN POWS AND POLISARIO DETAINEES, ALLUDES TO "DECISIVE SUMMER" FOR POLISARIO POSITION ON A PEACEFUL SOLUTION

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Marc Sievers, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

Summary

1. (C) DCM met with Polisario "Ambassador" to Algiers Mohammed Beissat May 19 at Beissat's request to accept a letter from Polisario Secretary General Abdelaziz to Secretary Rice (original faxed to NEA/MAG) and for a readout

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on Abdelaziz's May 10-13 visit to the U.S. Abdelaziz's letter not surprisingly depicts Polisario as the party seeking a peaceful solution in the context of UNSC resolutions, and Morocco as the intransigent party. It also requests a meeting between Abdelaziz and the Secretary "and/or other senior officials of the Department of State in order to express our views on the UN peace process in the Western Sahara." Beissat told DCM that this summer would be critical for the Polisario's continued pursuit of a peaceful solution. Polisario planned to send envoys to "every member-state of the UN" in order to gauge international support for a peaceful solution, by which he meant international willingness to apply pressure on Morocco to accept a referendum. If the envoys did not find such willingness, Polisario "would need to consider other options," he warned. DCM cautioned that Polisario would find itself completely isolated if it abandoned the UN framework. DCM also noted growing international insistence that Polisario release the remaining 408 Moroccan POWs. Beissat responded that Abdelaziz represented the moderates in the Polisario, but without progress toward peace, he would not be able to control the radicals much longer. On the POWs, Beissat said they were a "useful reminder" that the Western Sahara conflict continued. Morocco, he claimed, had provided no accounting for the fate of 150 Polisario POWs and 600 "disappeared" civilians that the Polisario insists were detained by Morocco in the late 1970s and '80s. Until it did so, Polisario had no incentive to release the remaining Moroccans. DCM insisted the POWs were a humanitarian issue and Polisario should release them without conditions. Beissat concluded that there needed to be international pressure on both sides, not just on the Polisario. End summary.

Abdelaziz Visit to U.S.

2. (C) Beissat began by describing Polisario Secretary General Mohammed Abdelaziz's May 10-13 visit to the U.S. as "excellent." Abdelaziz had met with "many old friends" in Congress, including Senators Kennedy and Imhofe and Representative Pitts, and had then gone to Houston to meet James Baker. Abdelaziz and Baker, he said, had discussed "all the issues" in a "very informative" meeting. Beissat did not respond to a question about the content of the discussions with Baker other than to say that Baker remained a valued "source of advice." Beissat said Abdelaziz had been "disappointed" that there had not been any response to a request for a meeting at the State Department. Receiving Abdelaziz "at a senior level" would be a "good step."

Appealing for U.S. Help

3. (C) DCM reviewed the state of U.S. relations with Morocco and Algeria, noting that the U.S. had a longstanding special relationship with Morocco which would not change, but also had an increasingly important partnership with Algeria. Beissat said Polisario regarded the U.S. relationship with Morocco "as an asset, not a threat," provided that the U.S. used the relationship to promote peace. Beissat said that without progress toward peace, the leadership of the Polisario was under increasing pressure from hard-liners who wanted to push moderates such as Abdelaziz aside. A senior-level U.S. meeting with Abdelaziz would help boost peace. The hard-liners were arguing that Polisario had wasted fifteen years pursuing the UN framework and had betrayed the cause of Sahrawi self-determination. Without progress toward peace, what arguments did the leadership have to refute these accusations? The U.S. is the champion of freedom and democracy in the world. Why would it not support

the democratic option in the Western Sahara, i.e. a referendum?

Envoys to Travel to All UN Members

14. (C) Beissat said this summer would be crucial for the Polisario. They planned to send envoys to all UN member-states to ask them all to push for a peaceful solution (i.e. for pressure on Morocco to accept a referendum). If the envoys found international support, the Polisario leadership would be able to maintain its position. If not, he warned, they would have to "consider other options." DCM pushed back, noting that there was international consensus in support of the UN framework. Polisario would be completely isolated if it tried to resume the use force. Beissat said the Polisario had been disappointed by the latest UNSC resolution on the Western Sahara, which he said only referred to maintaining the ceasefire and freeing Moroccan POWs. The resolution "smelled of the French," he claimed, and was one-sided in its raising Moroccan concerns without reference to the Polisario's.

Moroccan POWs and Accounting for Polisario Missing

15. (C) DCM said the Polisario should release all the remaining 408 Moroccan POWs. This was a strictly humanitarian issue, there was growing American sympathy for the Moroccan prisoners, and Polisario's insistence on holding them made Polisario (and Algeria) look bad. Beissat responded that Polisario was willing to take the heat because holding on to the Moroccan POWs was the only way to remind the international community that there was still a conflict in the Western Sahara. Both the UN Settlement Plan and the Baker Plan had called for the release of all prisoners and the return of refugees as soon as the date of a referendum was set. Why did the international community not demand that Morocco account for missing Sahrawis, if not insist that it accept a referendum? Beissat said that in the early days of the conflict in the late seventies and early eighties, Morocco had captured about 150 Polisario armed men and arrested about 600 Sahrawi civilians. Even if Morocco no longer held any of them, it had never made any accounting for their fate. Morocco had even ignored ICRC requests for information, and the ICRC had undermined its neutrality by accepting Morocco's silence. At the very least, Morocco should provide death certificates and offer compensation to their families. Polisario had already released thousands of Moroccans, but had received nothing in return. DCM reiterated that releasing the remaining prisoners would be an important humanitarian gesture; continuing to hold them would only further damage the Polisario's reputation.

16. (C) Beissat concluded the meeting by saying that Polisario knew it was the weaker party, but that did not mean it was defeated. What was needed was international pressure on both sides in order to make progress. Polisario would accept the outcome of a referendum, no matter what it was. But simply giving in to Morocco was out of the question.

17. (U) Minimize considered.

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